The Weaver's Knot.

By FRANK H. SWEET.

"OH, dear! I can't do it. I can't. I've been tryin' a whole week now, an' I ain't no nearer than when I started. I might as well give up tryin' an' go back. 'Tain't in me."

There was a pitiful despair in the speaker's voice, and the long, lean face looked so woebegone as to be almost grotesque. But the eyes were beautiful—beautiful and pathetic, like the ox's when overworked or the mountain pheasant's when caged and brought from its solitudes—large, full orbed, lustrous eyes, looking out with frightened uncertainty upon new things. Josie glanced into them and checked the laugh which had bubbled as far as her lips, for the cause of the despair was only the tying of a weaver's knot.

"Oh, well, Melindy," she said reassuringly, "I guess you'll get it all right in time. Most weavers have trouble at first. I know I did. That knot's the hardest kind in the world till you learn how; then it's the easiest. See." And she passed her fingers across a thread, apparently just touching it, and there was a knot. Melindy looked on admiringly, despairingly.

"It's the fingers," she declared drearily. "Yours is soft an' smooth an' long, an' mine"— She held up her big, toil worn hands as more eloquent than words, and Josie nodded an assent.

"Yes, fingers help," she agreed, "but yours'll wear smooth in time."

"I don't know," skeptically. "My fingers are pretty nigh big's your wrist an' 'bout as chunked. I ain't a bit o' finger tips, an' they're what tie the knots. Mine's been all roughed up choppin' down trees in the woods an' handlin' the goad drivin' cattle an' peelin' tanbark an' things like that. The inside o' my hands is almost hard's a bone. I don't beleeve they ever can git soft ag'in, to have feelin' like yours. I ought to 'a' stayed back in the woods."

"But you said you couldn't earn over a dollar a week there at most," reminded Josie, "and here you can make five or six after you learn how to weave. I'm making that now and sometimes more. You want to do a lot of things for the brothers and sisters you've been telling me about and for your sick mother. If you give up, you'll have to give that up too."

"If there was a chanct, the least bit of a chanct, I'd never give up," said Melindy, a flush coming to her lean face, "but I can't see's there is. Pap an' me once chopped in the woods all winter to pay a sickness bill o' ma's, an' I worked jest as long every day as he did an' got the meals, an' we didn't give up till every last cent was paid. Our folks don't give up. That's why I've stuck to this knot a whole week, when I knew it wan't no use at the end of the first day. It's jest wastin' your time an' my time, an' the only thing is for me to go back home."

There was no break in the voice now, but Josie felt vaguely that a tragedy lay behind the words, deeper than she could understand. Involuntarily her hand fell upon the big, rough one softly.

"Just you try it a few more days, Melindy," she advised. "Folks never know what they can do till it comes. They think they can't, and it's no use, and they won't try any more, and then

"MY FINGERS ARE PRETTY NIGH BIG'S YOUR WRIST."

all at once their eyes are opened, and they find they can. If I were you, Melindy, I wouldn't give up a weaver's knot after just one week. It ain't so hard as learning a crow to sing, and I was four months getting to that first tune. And I'm not thinking of stopping yet. And, Melindy," hesitating a little and looking her companion inquiringly in the face, "I guess this means a good deal to you, more than just the work and the dollars."

Melindy turned her face away, but not before Josie saw in the depths of the big, patient eyes a frightened shadow.

"Yes, it means a good deal," slowly, "a good deal—everything. If I go back into the woods I shan't ever come out ag'in. I shan't dast. It'll be choppin' wood an' strippin' tanbark all the rest o' my life, an'—I hate it, I hate it!" her voice becoming bitter. "It's so—so little when there's so much I want to do. But it'll have to come. I'm willin' to try that knot another week or so longer, Josie, since you want me to, but it's time wasted."

The cotton mill was a small affair, built many years before and still wholly dependent upon its water wheel for power. Its help was almost as crude as its motive force, being drawn mainly from the wild country in back and learning here inadequately upon the very machines they were later to use. In each department a few experienced operators had been brought up from the more conceutrated mill section below, and these few were expected to show new hands about the work in addition to running machines. Josie Brock was one of these operators in the weave shop and Melindy Weeks perhaps the crudest of all the new hands. But then Melindy Weeks had come from the wildest of the back country, walking thirty-five miles with her baggage tied in a newspaper.

The water supply was a small stream as inefficient as the rest of the mill outfit. During seven months of the year it did all that could be asked, and the mill ran full time, but through the other five, when little rain fell and there was no snow to melt, the stream often shrank to a tiny thread, and then the great water wheel ceased to revolve until the stream rose a few inches, when it would start again and run for an hour or so and then stop for the water once more to rise.

During Melindy's first week the mill had made full time, for there had been rains, but the day after her talk with Josie this temporary supply became exhausted, and the stream commenced to shrink. When they went out to dinner, Josie cast an anxious glance at two sand bars which were beginning to show in the middle of the stream.

"When the sand bars run together," she said to Melindy, "the water 'll be too low to move the wheel, and then we'll have to stop. And from the way the bars look now it'll be by 2 o'clock. We'll likely stay shut down till 5 or so, then start up and run an hour or two in the evening to help make up. It's likely to be that way right along now until another rain. Well, I'll bring in some crochet work to help fill in time, but I guess my $6 this week won't be over $4."

"I can't do crochet work an' things like that," returned Melindy, "so if we stop I guess I'll go out an' look round some."

So at 2 o'clock, when, as Josie had predicted, the machinery began to go slower and slower and finally stopped with the necessary shutting off of the vanishing power, Melindy took her hat and went out. But instead of looking around the village, as she had first thought, her steps took her naturally up the stream toward the woods. She had been away from them a whole week. In a few minutes she had vanished among the foliage.

An hour later she came hurrying back, an odd look of interest in her face.

"Where can I find a shovel?" she asked the yardman.

He jerked his thumb toward a small building. "In the tool house there, I guess," he answered. "Found some wild posies ye want to take up, eh? Well, wipe the shovel off dry when ye're through an' put it back jest where ye find it."

Melindy nodded and went on to the tool house, from which she presently emerged with a long handled spade.

At half past 4 one of the owners and the superintendent were walking on the dam watching the water. It had risen about three inches.

"Not much show for more than an hour's work, I think," said the superintendent.

"I'm afraid so. In the end we shall have to put in steam power, I suppose, though that will be more expensive than our little mill warrants."

They walked on to the end of the dam and leaned against the log frame of the water gate. Fifteen minutes passed. Then the superintendent uttered a wondering exclamation and leaned forward, peering down at the water.

"Great Scott," he exclaimed, "four inches of water since we've been standing here! That's seven inches and plenty enough to keep us going till 9 o'clock. And look yonder up the stream! There's a regular freshet coming down! What's it mean, anyhow? There isn't a cloud in the sky, so it isn't a cloudburst. But never mind, though. I know what it means," hastily. "It means a full day's work for tomorrow and the next day and maybe for the next. Excuse me now, sir. You can stay and watch the phenomenon if you like. I must run and get that mill started."

Twenty minutes later the owner was still standing there, beaming, but perplexed. Then he saw a girl coming toward him with a spade over her shoulder, her hands soiled and her face red from recent exertion.

"How's the water comin' on?" she asked affably.

"Fine," he smiled, "but I cannot understand the reason, only the result. I hope it will keep on like this for awhile."

"It'll keep on pretty well, but not like this," she answered in a matter of fact voice. "I guess the water 'll come down 'bout twice as fast as it did before, an' it'll come pretty steady."

He looked at her in amazement.

"What, you know where it comes from?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, it's jest a pond I tapped," she answered. "I was lookin' for lilies an' went clear round the pond. It covers much as five or six acres, I guess, an' on the other side there's a brook most as big as this that runs off into a swamp. An' I didn't see any place where water run in. That made me know the pond was full o' spring holes where the water boils up pretty fast. But I didn't think anything special till I got back to this stream an' sat down. Then I noticed water tricklin', and that made me know the pond was higher, an' I got up an' looked round. Then I come for the shovel."

"And you cut through?" he asked, intensely interested.

She nodded. "'Twa'n't more'n ten feet. I commenced at the river an' dug 'bout three or four feet deep till I got

"YOU'VE BEEN HERE LONG ENOUGH TO SEE WHAT HANDS DO."

near the pond, then tapped through. An' I got pretty wet an' muddy," she finished, laughing. "I guess I'd better run to the boardin' house an' clean up 'fore I go in the mill."

"And you cut through," he repeated. "Strange that you should discover such a thing, and we never thought of it in all the years we've been here. I've hunted around that pond a hundred times, I suppose, and never thought of there being any difference in the level of the water."

"Oh, it was jest one o' them things that happens," she answered carelessly. "I set right where the water trickled down, an' I was thinkin' 'bout the mill stoppin' for water. I couldn't help the rest. If I'd set down ten foot off I'd never have thought, an' I might 'a' walked a hundred times round the pond without noticin'. But if I was you I'd send some men up an' dig that ditch twice as deep. It would let the water in better. An' I'd stop up the brook on t'other side. Then you'd have the whole thing."

"I'll do it at once," he said quickly, "and thank you for the suggestion. "And now about yourself? We must do something in return for all this. I don't believe you realize what that water means to us."

Her face flushed. "If that means givin' me something," she answered soberly, "I guess you'd better not study over it any more. Back where I came from we don't have folks give us anything, an' my work would 'a' fetched less 'n 5 cents."

When she returned to the mill, Josie met her with sober face.

"The overseer's been here talking to me," she said hesitatingly, "and—and he doesn't seem to think it's any use for you to keep on at the knot. He wants me to take on another girl to show. I'm awfully sorry, Melindy."

But Melindy did not seem in the least disconcerted.

"I've known it since the first day," she returned composedly, "but you wanted me to keep on tryin'. This 'll save both of us wastin' more time."

As she was turning away the overseer came hurrying toward them, embarrassed and apologetic.

"You haven't told her yet?" he asked of Josie. Then, glancing at her face: "Yes, I see you have. Well, it was all a big mistake what I said. I've just been talking with the superintendent. We want Miss Melindy to take a job as spare hand."

"As a gift?" asked Melindy coldly.

"No," eagerly, "as real, needed help. You've been here long enough to see what the spare hands have to do. You're stronger than any girl in here and can do the work of a man. There'll be warps and cuts of cloth to carry and help of all kinds to do. Good land, there'll be work enough! We'll pay $4 a week at first. Will you stay?"

"Yes, please do, Melindy," urged Josie.

Melindy looked from one to the other doubtfully; then her face cleared.

"Yes, I'll stay," she answered. "There's plenty of work I can do. I've seen that. I guess I can earn the money."

Three months later she came to Josie one morning, her face radiant. "See, Josie," she breathed, "I—I can do it. I can get a loom an' weave. See." And she took a thread and passed her fingers over it, and, behold, there was a weaver's knot.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING.